

In 2010-11, 23 North Carolina schools received federal School Improvement Grants (SIG)

The schools use improvement strategies including small classes, increased student learning time, more teachers and curriculum specialists, more staff professional development, literacy initiatives, more community services and supports, and intensive student supports. With the grant funding, schools can hire staff members to serve particular school needs. Joining SIG schools this year were guidance, career, and mental health counselors; literacy, math and science specialists; graduation coaches; and others. The program is beginning to make a difference – one student at a time. Here are two inspirational stories of recent high school graduates.

Warlick Graduate Receives Football Scholarship

Cody Wilson, a June 2011 graduate of Warlick Academy, Gaston County Schools, accepted a college scholarship to play football at Rochester Community and Technical College in Minnesota this fall. Wilson will be the first student to graduate from Warlick with a scholarship.

Teacher Dell Richardson encouraged Wilson to play football his senior year. “It feels real good that I was able to make a difference in his life, but ultimately he had to do all the work.”

Wilson was a member of the Charlotte AFC Rangers, a team comprised of home, private and public school students who would otherwise not have the opportunity to participate in football at the high school level. Warlick does not have a football team.

“Cody always had a great attitude and became a leader, not by example, but by the effort he put forward,” said Rangers head coach Hugh Hicks. “I was very impressed with him.”

Wilson credits the faculty and staff at Warlick for helping him to achieve academic and athletic success. “In



Warlick teacher Dell Richardson (left) and student Cody Wilson.

two years, I want to be able to transfer to a university and work toward a degree as a doctor or a lawyer,” said Wilson. “I may not have graduated or be in the position I am now to go to college if it wasn’t for the staff at Warlick.”

Extended Day Graduate Sets High Goals for College and Beyond

As an eighth grader attending a traditional middle school in Davidson County, 13-year-old Samantha Sparks didn’t have much of a choice about coming to Davidson County Extended Day School, an alternative school.

“I had missed too many days to go on to high school,” she explains. “When I did go to school, I just sat around and slept. I stopped caring about anything and my schoolwork suffered. So I just did nothing.”

Unfortunately, Samantha’s attitude wasn’t any better at Extended Day. Her minimal effort was enough for her to squeak by with a semester of “barely passing” grades that allowed her to join her freshman class at the traditional high school.



Literacy specialist Donna Smith (left) with Samantha Sparks.

Her brief time at the traditional high school was spent going to parties, staying at home watching TV, and doing anything she wanted “which was actually nothing,” she explains. “It’s funny, I left school because I was bored and then went home and did absolutely nothing. I guess I was too young to understand the psychology behind that.”

Samantha admits that she had “a lot of 9th grade years” at Extended Day School. Teachers who knew Samantha back then say that she had potential, but lacked confidence and preferred to hide behind a self-contrived “bad girl” persona. “With a sassy mouth to go with it,” Samantha adds. “I am ashamed when I think back to some of the things I said to teachers who tried so hard to help me.”

One day a teacher told Samantha point blank, “You’re too smart for this stupid stuff.” She couldn’t get her teacher’s words out of her mind. Later that year, lying on a stretcher in a hospital emergency room, Samantha knew that it was time to take inventory of the choices she was making.

Slowly, Samantha began making better choices in school. Before long, her natural love of learning and newly-found focus and self discipline took over. The June 2011 class valedictorian will attend Salem College, where she has received \$30,000 in awards, this fall.

Eventually, she would like to attend an Ivy League law school and have a career in the political science arena.

Samantha is thankful for her family and teachers who were willing to give her second and third chances until she could make mature decisions of her own.

Samantha is not the only one who has changed at Extended Day School. Through a School Improvement Grant, additional faculty has been added to the staff this year, Samantha's senior year in high school. A school counselor and career coach have been available to Samantha to assist in documenting credit needed to apply to college and to provide her with additional information about the application process. A literacy team, including a literacy specialist and five literacy coaches, assist students in their classrooms and were some of Samantha's most ardent supporters.

The author of the Davidson County Extended Day School story, Donna Smith, is a literacy specialist there. "I am proud to be the 'storyteller' in this inspirational success story. I am hoping we will inspire other successful, transformed students who were once resigned to being referred to as 'dropouts' to tell their stories some day."

Mrs. Smith first worked with Samantha to help her develop her personal statement for a college application. "Teachers are often so busy attending to curriculum and other students that having a team of adults available to students in an alternative setting is invaluable," Mrs. Smith says.

School Improvement Grants are authorized under section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Title I or ESEA).

